IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel Claims 5 to 14, 16, and 17 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter recited therein. Please amend Claim 1, and add new Claims 19 and 20, as shown below.

1. (Currently Amended) An exposure method using near-field light, comprising:

preparing an exposure mask having an opening formed with lengthwise directions extending in ~~orthogonal~~ plural directions, the opening having a width smaller than a wavelength of exposure light, the width being perpendicular to one of the lengthwise directions;

contacting the exposure mask to ~~a workpiece~~ an object to be exposed; and

~~detecting one of the lengthwise directions of the opening; and~~

projecting the exposure light ~~that is polarized in a direction of an angle of approximately 45° with respect to the lengthwise directions of the opening, to generate near-field light~~ on the exposure mask to generate near-field light at the opening, and forming a pattern based on the opening on the object,

wherein ~~the opening has a width that is smaller than a wavelength of~~ the exposure light is circularly polarized light.

2. and 3. (Cancelled)

4. (Previously Presented) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the opening of the exposure mask is formed with lengthwise directions extending only in mutually orthogonal directions.

5. to 17. (Cancelled)

18. (Previously Presented) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the exposure light is emitted from a laser.

19. (New) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the circularly polarized light is transformed from a light having a polarization property of linear polarization.

20. (New) A method according to Claim 19, wherein the circularly polarized light is transformed by a quarter waveplate.